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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to: (1) gather data which would permit researchers to describe the teaching behaviors and language characteristics of parents during literacy events with their children; (2) analyze these data for positive or negative influences of parents' oral language on their children's participation in the reading/writing activities; and (3) determine any differences in these interactive behaviors between the first-of-the-year data and the end-of-the-year data. Ten families agreed to be videotaped with their first grade children during storybook readings and accompanying writing activities. Two at-home, parent/child tapings were scheduled; a third taping took place in school. Analyses of the first tapings indicated clearly that storybook time was when parents read and children listened. Two differences were apparent when the second tapings were analyzed. First, the researcher/child tapes and the curriculum of the classroom appeared to have encouraged parents to view their children as readers even though the reading proficiency of the children varied. Secondly, the language transactions between parents and their children were far more positive than early in the year. When presented with information about strategies to enable the natural development of literacy, parents were able to better support the children's learning strategies. Both linguistic and communicative competence grow out of children's meaningful and purposeful use of language in sharing what they know and are coming to know. (Forty-one references and two appendixes containing the Adult/Child Reading Partnership Coding System and the Parent/Child Reading Partnership Scale are attached.) (MG)

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THE LANGUAGE OF ADULTS AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CHILDREN'S
DEVELOPING LITERACY

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ABSTRACT

Findings from the following descriptive research efforts reaffirm that the expectations of parents for their children's learnings are actualized in the experiences, materials and parent-child interactions in the home; and, from a sociopsycholinguistic perspective, further our knowledge base regarding teaching strategies that foster children's natural growth towards literacy. Collectively, our studies provide evidence of the powerful influence of parents' language on children's literacy behaviors during storybook readings and picture/scripting activities. The initiating and responding language of both parents and children, outside the actual reading of the story text and during the drawing/writing activities, were analyzed to determine characteristics of these language transactions as they functioned to enable or limit the children's own reading and writing strategies. Our findings demonstrate that the positive cognitive conflict in children's thinking so necessary to their ongoing revision of ideas and understandings of how written language works occurs far more successfully in adult/child dialoguing that supports the child's own tentative understandings and subsequent learning strategies.

THE LANGUAGE OF ADULTS AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CHILDREN'S DEVELOPING LITERACY

Introduction

Much has been written about children's early literacy behaviors. Articles abound with wonderful examples of their early use of written language. These examples confirm children's search for meaning in print: how they construct a personal rule system for making print work for them; how they try out their tentative rules and revise them when they do not work or when there are new cues as to what might work better; and how they move in developmental ways towards use of the conventional orthography and spellings of their culture and towards becoming proficient readers.

Viewing this learning-to-become-literate process of children as naturally developing one, we are more aware of factors in their daily learning experiences that can encourage them to try to make sense out of the written language in their world. We are reminded by many of the importance of reading to children so that they make connections between the story being read and the printed text of the book; of noticing with them the environmental print that surrounds them; and of writing and reading letters, cards, messages and lists with them so they can see print used in purposeful ways.

However, as important as this knowledge is for both parents and teachers, we may be neglecting a factor that impinges directly upon children's beliefs about themselves as writers and readers and, consequently, upon their early literacy efforts. That factor is the influence of oral language transactions between adults and children during the most impromptu or planned written language event.

What follows is a sharing of what we have learned in our considerations of the characteristics of adult language behaviors that can enable or limit children's

entrance into what Frank Smith calls the "literacy club". Our knowledge comes from research data collected in homes during parent/child reading and writing activities as well as data collected in early childhood classrooms during similar literacy events with teachers and groups of children. For the purpose of this manuscript, however, only the parent/child studies will be discussed. We trust that both the research processes and our findings will be of interest to other researchers.

Theoretical Assumptions Underpinning Our Research

The impetus for our studies originated with understandings growing out of the early work of the late Ira Gordon and his associates with parents and their very young children through the research years of his Parent Education Model of Project Follow Through (Gordon, Guinagh, & Jester, 1977; Greenwood, Ware, Gordon, & Rhine, 1981). The reported findings throughout these studies consistently supported Gordon's initial assumption that what parents believed their children should learn and how they could learn was actualized in the interactions between parents and children during everyday learning experiences in the home. A rather simplistic set of criteria for parents' teaching strategies, known as Desirable Teaching Behaviors (DTBs), was one way of demonstrating and evaluating effective teaching strategies for parents to use with their children (Olmsted, Webb, & Ware, 1977; Packer & Hoffman, 1976; Shea & Hoffman, 1977).

Of particular interest for us was what we perceived as embedded in each of the suggested teaching behaviors: that the language of the parents could give critical cues to their expectations for children's competence. For example, within the DTBs were strategies which encouraged parents to ask open-ended questions, to provide explanations when needed, to encourage children to respond and to enlarge upon their answers, and to give praise for the children's efforts. How children interpreted these cues, as evidenced in their oral responses or learning behaviors

could indicate how they viewed themselves as learners.

We found support for the potential significance of these language transactions in the writings of Frank Smith and Michael Halliday. Smith's (1975) assumption has been that children attempt to comprehend by relating new experiences to what is known from prior experiences, and learn by changing existing cognitive structures when the new information does not seem to make a match with understandings they already have. His position, quite Piagetian in nature, led us to ponder relationships between the ways children construct a theory of how written language works and their interactions with literate adults in this cognitive, linguistic process of making meaning out of print. Learning to use written language, after all, is an effort in making new connections. And these connections can only be made when both the physical and human learning environments enable and encourage such learnings.

Halliday's (1978) writings drew our attention even more to the role of oral language during these adult/child interactions. His consideration of how language functions and varies within the context of the social situation suggested that the cognitive processing of children during literacy events could indeed be influenced by their interpretation of the expectations for their learning as heard in the language of "teaching" adults. It seemed to us, for example, that how adults questioned children (the heuristic function of language) or how they used the function of informative language could hold important cues for children's responses to literacy events, especially in light of his notion of register -- Halliday's term to denote language variances which are dependent upon field, tenor and mode. Furthermore, we speculated that how children's oral language functioned in response to that of the adults could hold additional cues related to their willingness to be literacy risk takers with their tentative understandings about how print works.

The theoretical assumptions of Gordon, Smith and Halliday came together for us as we considered literacy learning as cognitive tasks within the context of social situations. The inherent nature of lap reading and bedtime reading to young children, for example, suggested an interactive social event between the adult and the child. Correlations between reading to children and their oral language development had been reported in the research of several scholars (Chomsky, 1972; Durkin, 1978; Fodor, 1966; Irwin, 1960; and MacKinnon, 1959). And, the research of other scholars (Cook-Gumperz, 1977; Doake, 1981; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Goodman & Altwerger, 1981; Graves, 1978; and Harste, Burke, & Woodward, 1982) was providing emerging evidence that children learn to use written language in ways developmentally similar to how they learn to use oral language.

Teale's (1982, p. 562) explanation that "reading and writing for the young child are in their very beginning stages conducted inter-psychologically, i.e., in the interaction between the literate person(s) and the preschooler, and speech is what enables literacy to be conducted interpsychologically," gave further credence to our theoretical connection-making at that time. The research literature gave support to literacy learning as cognitive processes in interactions with others. And there was a valid rationale for the assumption that the oral language surrounding the reading and writing experiences of young children could be an influencing factor in children's developing literacy behaviors.

Although interactions between mother/child dyads during picture book readings had been studied by Flood (1977), Heath (1980), and Teale, Estrada, and Anderson (1981), an earlier report of Guinagh and Jester (1972), moved us closer to our own research questions. Their study responded to Durkin's 1966 findings that selected early readers shared the commonality of having been read to from early on, and to the 1969 Gallup report indicating that not only had the above grade-level first graders in that survey been read to by parents but nearly 50% of the below-grade-

level first graders also had been read to on a regular basis. Guinagh and Jester questioned whether the salient factor in children's early reading was that parents read to them or was more related to how parents read.

Their Parent As Reader Scale (PARS) measured the teaching ability of parents during a storybook reading activity. In all but one of the ten scale items there was the implication that the amount and quality of language used by the mothers were related directly to the quality of her teaching behaviors. Their findings gave evidence of strong correlations between how the parent shared a picture book with her child and measures of trust and cognitive development of the child. The more "expressive" the mother's language during the shared book experience and the more the child was encouraged to be an active participant in the event, the stronger the indicators of the child's cognitive functioning and trust of self and parent within the context of the shared storybook event. Guinagh and Jester concluded that the "ability of some of the mothers to talk with the children seemed very natural; to others it was an unnatural, strained performance " and that parents needed help to develop skills in reading to their children so that "reading becomes an experience that will be maintained because it is enjoyed" (p. 177).

The unanswered questions in this study, however, were the most intriguing ones: Is it that the language of the adult was more than just "expressive?" Did the adult's language carry expectations for the child's ability to be a participant? If so, can characteristics of oral language be described in ways more specific for determining how the adults' language functions in similar literacy events and how it may influence children's learning? Our research questions, therefore, became those which focused on consideration of the language variables heard in adults' teaching strategies and responded to by children in their own learning and language behaviors during planned reading and writing activities.

Selecting An Appropriate Research Design and Procedures

Each of our studies used a descriptive research paradigm, based on informed understandings of language learning from sociopsycholinguistic theory and Guba's (1982) assertion to assess the "fit between characteristics of the phenomenon or phenomena to be studied and the axioms of the inquiry paradigm options" (p. 1). Our assumptions about the role of oral language in literacy learning necessitated consideration of adult/child interactions during literacy events in natural learning environments. We viewed such interactive processes as those for which prior assertions about what would happen were not possible. Because of the interactions between context factors and processes within literacy events, Bogdon and Biklen (1982) concurred that such complexities must be studied holistically within natural settings.

In addressing Guba's notion of "trustworthiness" for descriptive research, the following methodological procedures were adhered to. Multiple sources of data were collected for "triangulation" with coding and analyses of data verified through team checks to insure "credibility". Thorough descriptions of the research processes were made for "transferability" from one study to another and for "dependability" of procedures. All video and audio tapes were transcribed for verification of what had been heard and seen onsite and to provide typescripts of those tapes for the actual data coding and the analysis process. Collectively, these procedures enabled us to reflect on the meaning of our data, to support any shifts in understandings and, thereby, to attend to "reflexivity for confirmability" (Guba, 1981, p. 88; 1982, pp. 24, 25).

In each of the parent/child studies, parents were interviewed for self-report data prior to the first taping sessions. These informal but structured interviews were guided by Garber's (1970) Home Environment Review (HER) and the Burke (1974) Interview of Reading. The HER was designed to assess parents' beliefs about the

home as a learning environment and themselves as teachers of their children. Use of this instrument had been reported in the research of Garber and Ware (1972) and Hanes and Shea (1977); and a reexamination of HER data produced during the early years of the Parent Education Model of Follow Through had been presented by Hoffman (1981). Modifications of the Burke Interview invited parents to talk about their perceptions of both reading and writing, what makes a reader and a writer, and how they perceived their own children as written language users.

Repeated video or audio tapings over time were made in the homes of families. Not only did these provide the actual language data but also permitted study of the self-reported data from the interviews in relationship to the actual practices of the adult during the literacy events with their children. The children's written language samples were collected to verify their production process during any of the planned writing activities.

Summary of Our Research and Significant Findings

The Initial Study: Procedures and Findings

Procedures. Our first study was in consort with a research project that was to follow a first grade teacher moving from a traditional reading program into a whole language model of literacy instruction with her students. Inherent in this curriculum model is support for the belief that children learn to read and to write holistically and without the direct teaching of isolated skills and phonics prior to meaningful experiences with reading and writing. This perspective recognizes the importance of children constructing knowledge for how written language works and promotes the natural developmental processes involved in becoming a reader and a writer. The teaching strategies encourage children's own learning strategies and enable them to be confident enough with their own tentative understandings to take risks in making personal meaning with print.

If school and home were to be mutually supportive of children's learning, it seemed appropriate to determine the literacy learning experiences in these homes, the parents' perceptions of how young children learn to read and to write, and the teaching strategies they might use with their children. Therefore, we extended an invitation to all of the parents of the children to participate in a home component of that research project.

Ten families (eight mothers and two fathers) volunteered and agreed to be videotaped with their children during storybook readings and accompanying writing activities. Two at-home, parent/child tapings were scheduled: the first one during the early weeks of the school year; the second one during the last few weeks of school. (At the time of the first tapings, mothers in two of the homes decided to participate, too.) Parents were asked to read, as they usually did, a researcher-selected book with their child. Following this shared reading, the children were asked to write a message to the classroom teacher, telling her whatever they wished. Parents were invited to support their child's efforts in ways that were typical of similar writing times with their youngster. Upon completion of these two tasks, the family watched a replay of the tape for the enjoyment of viewing the event on the television monitor.

A third taping of each child took place in school, later in the fall, and with a member of the research team as the reading/writing partner. Parents accepted an invitation to view their child's tape with the researcher and the classroom teacher. It was anticipated that, in discussing with the parents the language transactions within the teaching/learning strategies that enabled their children to enter into the literacy events as partners with the adult, parents would become aware of ways to improve their own interactions with their children.

The purpose of our study, then, was threefold: (1) to gather data which would permit us to describe the teaching behaviors and language characteristics of the

parents during literacy events with their children; (2) to analyze these data for positive or negative influences of the parents' oral language on their children's participation in the reading/writing activities; and (3) to determine any differences in these interactive behaviors between the first-of-the-year data, when parents might not expect their children to be readers and writers, and the end-of-the-year data, when they would be likely to expect their children to have reading and writing skills as a result of the first grade curriculum.

Getting to Know the Data. Although the videotapes captured the varied interactional situations and made possible repeated viewings of the data, it was necessary to have a systematic way for tuning into what the data were saying. Therefore, we turned to Gordon's Desirable Teaching Behaviors and the Guinagh and Jester Parent As Reader Scale to guide our initial attention to the recurring language exchanges between parent and child.

Beginning with the first data collection tapes, our notations indicated that during the reading episodes, parents initiated dialogue in expected ways: either by asking questions or making statements about the pictures or text of the storybook. The children responded, for the most part, with expected answers to questions or with words of agreement with comments parents had made. There were few times when the children's responses were more elaborate. When children initiated the dialogue, parent-response language seemed to have different characteristics than in parent-initiated interactions. And, in the few instances when children assumed any kind of reading behavior, the language of the parents appeared to carry a different meaning intent and, therefore, functioned differently in both the kinds of questions asked and the comments made. Our notations also suggested different reading "climates" during the storybook event. With some parent/child dyads, there was a flat or neutral relationship; with others, the relationship seemed more friendly and responsive; and at other times, the tenor was that of a

shared partnership in which the contributions of each one were appreciated and responded to equally. These role relationships appeared to change, depending upon which member of the dyad began the dialogue, how the other member interpreted the question or comment, and which member seemed to be in control.

Another facet of the reading event that caught our attention was related to time factors. One of the parents, for example, read the entire Wanda Gag book, *Millions of Cats*, in just three minutes! Certainly, child participation would be effected by the total length of time spent in the event. We noted the time spent to introduce the storybook, time that could provide an opportunity for the child to become familiar with the illustrations and potential story text, and a strategy in one of Gordon's DTBs, referred to as "stage setting." Time spent at the end of the actual reading was noted, time that could invite dialoguing about the story. And, finally, we considered the time allowed by the parent to lapse between asking a question or making a comment and the child's response. This time factor was also stressed in one of the Gordon DTBs: giving the learner enough time to think about the question or problem.

Typescripts were made of each tape and verified as to their accuracy by three research assistants. These typescripts included the story text and all of the parent/child language outside the actual written text: during the introduction of the event, the reading of the story and talking about the illustrations, and the conclusion of the reading event.

Coding the Data. Close examination of the typescripted data and careful listening to the tapes began to signal parents' expectations for the children's participation. Questioning strategies seemed to carry different intentions in dialogue initiated by the parent. We heard questions that were identified as expecting a specific response from the child: "What's that?" as the parent pointed to a picture; or "What was he doing?" after the text had been read. They appeared

to be comprehension questions that demanded a "correct" answer. These were coded as interrogation questions.

We also heard request questions, sincere questions seeking information from the child or asking for clarification of what the child said or meant. There were other questions that encouraged children to predict what might happen next and to elaborate on the author's perceived intent, or to relate personal experiences with what the text was conveying. "What do you think is going to happen next?" "Why do you think he did that?" "What happened when we got our new Kitty?" are examples of what we coded as invitation questions.

When parents initiated conversation with statements rather than questions, these, too, seemed to have differing characteristics. The most prevalent ones were direction statements: "Look at the picture." "Say it with me." Or, "There are a lot of --(cats), suggesting that the child should supply the appropriate word. When parents repeated these comments in a tone that became "demanding," we labeled them insistence statements.

Frequently, parents provided clarification of the text or explanations for what was happening in the story, coded as information statements. We also heard, although not often, parents make a comment that seemed to have particular importance: "I wonder what's going to happen when he brings all of those cats home," is an example. It seemed to be interpreted by the child as, "My parent does not know so I'm going to give my ideas." These statements were coded as invitations to the children to share their ideas.

The children initiated dialogue with questions asking for information, or with statements providing additional information and/or gave personal interpretations of the text and illustrations. In many instances, they repeated the words of the text or of their parent. Our coding indicated each of these language characteristics.

Responses were also labeled and entered onto the coding sheets. We noted when parents ignored children's comments or questions and when they corrected or rejected interpretations or predictions. We coded responses that promoted or provided additional cues and information or clarified notions; responses that promoted or provided further elaboration, prediction or risk-taking. There were parent responses that confirmed or supported children's interpretations and those that indicated valuing youngsters' efforts. These responding language characteristics were coded for the children, too, including, the often-heard "expected" response in answer to their parents' interrogation questions. We also noted when either the parent or the child appeared to take control of the situation.

Plus and minus values were assigned to the language behaviors, dependent upon informed perceptions of how these enabled or limited children's participation in the dialoguing. Similarly, values were assigned to the coded teaching strategies of parents during the event. Positive value was given to those teaching behaviors of the parents which accepted the children's natural learning-to-read efforts; negative value was assigned to those behaviors which were perceived to control the strategies children used as readers. (See Appendix A: Adult/Child Reading Partnership Coding System)

Data Analysis. When the language behaviors in Sections A and B of the instrument were noted on the coding sheets (i.e., interrogation question, a negative value), it was then marked with a plus (+) for analysis purposes; if it was not noted, it was marked with a minus (-). These values were computed (a plus and a minus equaling zero; two negatives or two positives equaling one) to produce a numerical score or rating for the language transactions in each of these coding components. Coding of each teaching and learning strategy was rated and tallied in the same way. Numerical ratings were assigned to the perceived tenor of the parent/child relationship: 1 for formal; 2 for friendly and responsive; 3 for

accepting and supportive. The total numerical ratings of the reading event components for each parent/child dyad ranged from 0 to 9, with what appeared to be distinct differences between the 0 through 3, 4 through 6 and 7 through 9 totals. (See Appendix B: Parent/Child Reading Partnership Scale)

The rating levels in this Scale were then translated into three categories of parents' teaching strategies and demonstrated children's learning/reading strategies. Consistent scale ratings of 1 was labeled a nonfacilitating model of teaching, one which limited the child's opportunities to be an active participant and learner. The parent does not appear to view reading a book as a teaching/learning event, does not enter into dialoguing with the child, and often ignores or rejects the child's efforts.

Ratings of 2 indicated a parent-initiated/child-response model of teaching, a model found in many classroom settings. Although there is a positive give and take in the teaching/learning process, the parent is the "teacher" in the interaction. There is support for the child's efforts but under the more direct instruction of the adult.

The child-initiated, self-help/parent-enabling model of teaching was that receiving consistent scale ratings of 3. The child is the initiator of questions and comments far more than the adult; and is self-directing in learning behaviors. The parent responds in confirming and accepting way which enables the child to demonstrate increased confidence in using personal understandings of how both oral and written language works.

Summary of Findings. Analyses of the first tapings indicated clearly that storybook time was when parents read and children listened. There was limited dialoging about the story and few opportunities for children to join into the actual reading process in any way. Parents usually initiated dialogues with interrogation questions to which the child replied with a single-word, or when

more than one word, still the expected response. The result of this language exchange was to end any further conversation between parent and child. Parents used direction comments to have children focus on a particular part of an illustration or listen to specific words and lines in the text. Children followed these directions but made no further contribution to the event.

When parents used information comments to provide explanations or clarifications, they allowed no time for children to respond except with a nod of the head or an "uhuh" in agreement with the parents' comment. Therefore, conversation about the storybook events, the illustrations or the author's intent did not happen.

Request questions from the parents resulted in children giving the information asked for or clarifying what they said or meant. Unfortunately, parents tended to "drop the ball" either by "parroting" what the child said in acknowledgment or ignoring what had been said, and continued reading. Once again, the opportunity for extended dialoguing was lost.

There were few examples of invitation questions or comments made by the parents. When these were used, however, children responded with language that predicted or interpreted the story events and/or elaborated upon their personal comments, all of which evidenced an active membership in the shared reading.

Just as parents had limited discussion of the book prior to the actual reading, they also promoted little, if any, discussion or retelling of the story by the child at the end of the story. The conclusion of the event was controlled by the parents closing the cover and often saying, "The end." In instances when parents included the child as a reading partner, it was only to read an expected "known" word or, in a few instances, to read together some of the repeated phrases in the story text: "Hundreds of cats, thousands of cats, millions and billions and trillions of cats", for example. Only one parent used the shared storybook

time to "teach" reading. Her teaching language consisted entirely of interrogation questions, direction and insistence statements: "What's that word?" "No, that's not kitten; it's cats." "C-a-t-s. That's how you spell it. Does that look like a 'k'?" "Now, what's that word?" When the child finally answered "cats" instead of "kitten," the mother said, "OK. You quit making your own words." And told the researcher, "And this is how I read with her." We were not surprised to hear the child's struggle with the reading process as well as the search for meaning in the text.

Placing these language transactions into the teaching/learning models described earlier, we found that one parent (a father) used a child-initiated, self-help/parent enabling model. The son began reading along with his father and, when the storybook was finished, used memory and assisted reading strategies to reread the book by himself. Four of the parents used traditional shared reading strategies and were placed in the parent-initiated/child-response instructional model. The other seven parents' model could only be categorized as a nonfacilitating one: parents dominated and controlled the entire event with children listening and following their directions.

In coding and analyzing the second tapings, we were aware of two differences. First, the researcher/child tapes and the curriculum of the first grade classroom appeared to have encouraged parents to view their children as readers even though the reading proficiency of the children varied. This was seen in the teaching strategies parents used during this taping. Secondly, the language transactions between parents and their children were far more positive than early in the year. Children initiated much more of the dialogue; predicted what the book might be about; talked about the pictures; elaborated on the text content. Parents asked more request and invitation questions, and responded with language that encouraged children's participation.

Parent teaching strategies were, for the most part, ones associated with traditional reading instruction. We heard directions to "sound out" words; heard more correcting of children's meaningful miscues than was necessary; and were still aware that parents provided limited wait-time for children to use their own strategies and supplied words before children could use picture or content cues to figure them out for themselves. Nevertheless, only one parent remained in the nonfacilitating category; five parents moved into the second reading partnership model to make a total of seven; and three parents, for a total of four, moved into the model categorized as child-initiated, self-help/parent-enabling.

Discussion: As we reflected on the findings from these data, we found further confirmation that what parents view as being important for their children to learn and how they believe their children are able to learn are reflected in the learning opportunities parents provide in the home and the teaching strategies they use with their children. The parents in this group all read for their own pleasure and read to their children; but, they also indicated that written language was skill-based and that skills needed to be taught before reading and writing could occur for the children. Perhaps that is why they reported in the interviews that their children "could tell a story from the pictures in the book but were not real readers," and they "could make the letters of the alphabet but could not really write.

Although we have not described the analysis procedures for the data collected during the writing activities, a summary of what we found will lend additional support to our findings. In the first tapings, parents initiated the task with interrogation questions or comments of direction and specific information. Their responses to the children's efforts were more often than not correcting or rejecting ones. Some parents made the decisions about what the child would write. Some told them where to place the letters or how to make them. They usually

spelled words for the children or had them try to "sound out" the word in order to write it. Some parents gave relevant cues to help the child figure out the writing process: "Why don't you get on the first page and see if you can find out how to write about the fat lady?" Others gave irrelevant and often confusing cues. One parent's response to his son's question about spelling 'cat' was: "Sound it out -- you know how to spell dog." One mother's cue for making the letter 'v' was: "It's an upside-down 'A' without a line in it." Children relied on the parents' directions or models, and the resulting products were more often than not the edited and/or corrected messages of the adults rather than the personally meaningful writings of the children.

On the otherhand, the second tapings evidenced an interesting phenomena. Without exception, all of these parents were more comfortable with and accepting of the child's self-initiated and self-directing model of writing than they were of that model of reading. Their language was less directive and more supportive: the children did more initiating of conversation with parents responding in ways that clearly valued the youngsters' efforts. It may have been that, because the children were bringing home their self-authored and invented spelling texts, parents could see the developmental process of learning to write and accepted this more than similar processes in becoming a reader (Hoffman, 1986).

In the educational agendas of these homes, there was an exchange of meanings between parent and child -- a meaning exchange founded in language which described, explained, elaborated, predicted, confirmed, accepted and supported; or, contradicted, corrected, pressured, rejected, and sometimes, even ignored. Our assumptions that the language of an adult in interaction with a child during a reading or writing event can carry powerful messages to that child found support in our data. These messages indicated what writing or reading is and is not, what children are or are not able to do as writers or readers, and, therefore, the way

children need to be "taught" to read or write. We also confirmed our assumptions that how children interpret these messages directly influences what they believe about their own competence as written language users. The oral language that the parents used in teaching strategies -- heard outside the reading of the printed text in the book, for example, or heard during a shared writing activity -- made a significant difference in these children's expectations for print should do, what they could do with print, and what they actually did as readers or writers.

Support from Our Other Parent-Child Studies

Growing out of perceptions that the curriculum and the classroom teacher or researcher might have impacted parents' understandings about the early reading behaviors of young children, Engley (1983) considered the extent to which parents' reading model with four-year olds might be influenced by the prekindergarten teacher's model of whole language. In repeated audiotapings in the home, the language used by the mothers during shared storybook experiences did indeed evidence increased acceptance of and support for the children's early reading efforts as these parents became more knowledgeable about the developmental nature of the reading process. Workshops held throughout the school year with open invitations for the mothers to listen to the teacher and the children read together in the classroom, encouraged parents to use shared storybook reading strategies that enabled their children to use the early learning-to-read strategies that Doake (1979) described in his writings. Engley concluded that a teacher's model of reading could influence parents in ways that influence young children's early reading behaviors. More importantly, she found support for our earlier study that the parents' language during these events was what encouraged these children to believe they were readers in their own ways.

We were also curious about the language differences of parents heard when the literacy activity changed from reading to writing with the children. McCully

(1982), another member of the original research team, investigated the language variances demonstrated within six mother/child dyads during picture-scripting activities. (These were the only children in that community who had not attended any prekindergarten program and would be entering kindergarten that fall.) Each child was invited to draw a picture and then to write about that picture. Each mother was told to respond to the child's efforts in ways that were typical of their usual interactions. Mothers seemed to expect the children to draw on their own and accepted the meaning intended for the pictures. They "took cues from the child's drawing and from what the child said while drawing to confirm the intent of the picture and its interpretation of meaning by the child" (Hoffman & McCully, 1984, p.42). When the activity shifted to writing about the picture, however, the tenor changed noticeably as heard in the very directing and controlling language of the parents. In other words, language varied "within the same adult/child pair, depending upon the role relationship established because of the adult's expectations for what the child did or did not know" (p. 44).

Searcy's (1984) research investigated another related question growing out of the original study. Although there had been only two fathers who volunteered for that study, language behaviors had been noted that appeared different than those of the mothers in the two families. It seemed appropriate to consider the possibility of language differences between mothers and fathers when they each worked with the same child during planned literacy events. Ten families with children entering school for the first time participated in videotapings in the home. Mother and child read, drew and wrote together at one taping; father and child at a second taping. Using the data from the picture/scripting activity, Searcy reported that, although there were differences between the language of the fathers and the mothers as two groups and language differences between families. Parents in the same family tended to use language indicating similar expectations

for their child during each of the activities. One wonders how this phenomena came about but the question was not within the scope of that study. He also reported noticeable differences in the language transactions within the same dyad, depending upon the activity. When the activity in which the parent and child were involved moved from drawing to writing, the parent's oral language evidenced skill-directed expectations rather than acceptance and support for the child's efforts. Not only did the language of the child respond to the parent's expectations but the written messages of that child also exhibited a negative influence of the shift in intended and/or perceived functions of the parent's language. Each of the children's written products clearly indicated a response to the parent's attention to mechanics and conventional orthography rather than proceeding with creating a personally meaningful text in their own ways. The findings from Searcy's study continued to support our collective research conclusions that the learning process and the demonstrated outcome are both dependent upon what adults believe children know (Searcy & Hoffman, 1988).

We returned to analyze the storybook reading data of the mother/child and father/child dyads collected during this same study and found similarities to the Searcy findings. Over all, the language and reading behaviors of parents within the same family indicated more similarities than those among the fathers and the mothers as groups. Some distinct differences appeared within families in the tenor of the reading event. Mothers were more demanding of the children and fathers more accepting and supportive of the children's efforts. Mothers also tended to talk more than fathers during the reading of the story. Although teaching strategies varied, they all demonstrated that children this age are not real readers and the primary role of the child, therefore, is to listen to the storybook. When the parent used the story as a teaching tool, the child's comments or efforts were in response to the parent's question or direction. And,

when these data were compared to those analyzed for the picture/scripting activity of the same parent/child dyads, we continued to find that the language and teaching behaviors of all of the parents changed noticeably from those which enabled children to be "equal" partners to those which directed and controlled children's efforts. Once more, expectations for the children's learnings were heard clearly in the parents' teaching language.

Concluding Remarks

These studies provided us with a means for analyzing language and teaching behavior data which substantiated that the language used by parents during shared literacy events with their children does indeed influence how children perceive themselves as beginning readers and writers. The expectations of parents for what their children may or may not know about written language and what they can or cannot do with written language were heard clearly in the kinds of initiating and responding language they used during both storybook readings and writing activities with their youngsters. Furthermore, children responded with language, learning behaviors and written language productions that matched the perceived expectations of the parents (Hoffman, 1987).

Our research also indicated that parents read and write with their children in ways that demonstrate their own models of reading and writing. They teach similarly to how they remember being taught and, for the majority of the parents in these studies, that meant directing children's attention to the isolated skills and mechanics of written language and having them copy the modeling of the adults. However, when presented with information about and strategies to enable the natural development of literacy learning, as in the initial study and the Engley study, they were able to better support the children's learning strategies. The use of language that invites the "learner" to be less dependent upon the "teacher" and to try those strategies that grow out of personal understandings at the time

for how written language works were crucial in the parents' instructional strategies.

Believing that becoming literate is a naturally developing process for children and that they do construct a meaningful rule system for using written language when the human and physical environments of their world enable this, it becomes important that parents gain working knowledge of the processes involved in children's literacy learning. Merely advocating that parents read to their children from early on is not sufficient. Parents need to know how to read with their children. More importantly, they must know the extent to which everyday language transactions with their children influences how these young learners view written language and how they can make sense out of print. Classroom teachers must also become improved users of the "language of teaching" that can enable children's own construction of knowledge as well as demonstrate to parents the language and instructional strategies that make such learning possible. This suggests quite clearly that teacher education must provide preservice and inservice teachers with this understanding and competence.

Perhaps the most important contribution that these studies have made to the research literature rests in support for the role of oral language in children's cognitive processing. Both Piaget and Vygotsky, in somewhat different ways, provided us with the theoretical understandings for how children learn. Piaget reminded us that children construct knowledge -- assimilating information from their environment, making connections with what they already know, revising what they know to make new connections with that which is in conflict with previous learnings -- and represent their understandings until there is further cognitive conflict and the process begins all over again. These processes are put into action best during interactions with others. Vygotsky's notion of a "zone of proximal development" helps us to realize that children solve these cognitive

conflicts in collaboration with those who know differently or more than they do at a given time. It is these significant others who provide new experiences, new ideas, and invite new ways for young learners to solve problems in their own ways.

Lindfors (1987) reminded us that "language is a powerful tool in comprehending and learning" (p. 263), and relates directly to early literacy learning. For example, questioning enables children to seek information they need to help them make sense out of print and to use print. Their questioning puts them in control of their own learning rather than responding to what others might believe they should need to know at a given time. The invitational comments and questions of adults encourage children's curiosity and let them move in their exploration of using print with their own strategies.

Language also enables children to talk about past experiences and to reinterpret these in light of new evidence. Once more, the language of adults must invite children to think about and share these experiences in order to make meaningful connections with new ideas. Not only does language help children to retrieve such information, it helps them go beyond their own experiences to share in more empathetic ways the experiences and understandings of others. Children use language to express ideas and explore what might be; and as adults encourage them to expand and elaborate upon their ideas, they become increasingly competent in communicative and linguistic skills.

Shared storybook reading is a vehicle for continuing the oral language development of young children, not only because books reinforce and expand the language of the child's world, but because shared reading affords the opportunity for child and adult to talk together and in consort with the author's written language. The language of the text and the dialoguing between the reading partners also serves as that important cognitive conflict in a child's thinking that encourages revision of ideas and understandings. It is in the language

transactions with others that cognitive growth in young children occurs most successfully. This interactive process must be part of children's early literacy experiences.

With many public schools initiating literature-based reading and writing programs, it is our informed position that the language of the teacher and of the peer members in literature study groups, for example, will be an important factor in inviting children's responses to shared literature, in valuing the variances in children's ideas and their ways of expressing these through both oral and written language, and in fostering intellectual autonomy for children in their literacy learnings. Both linguistic and communicative competence grow out of children's meaningful and purposeful use of language in sharing what they know and are coming to know. Therefore, our continuing research efforts have moved into classroom settings. Three of these have been reported elsewhere (Hoffman & Lilja, 1989; Hoffman & Schrader, 1987; Schrader, 1984; Simpson, 1988), and two other projects are in process. A summary of these research findings is being prepared and will be available from the primary investigator.

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APPENDIX A

ADULT/CHILD READING PARTNERSHIP CODING SYSTEM

A. Characteristics of Parents' Language

Parent-initiated questions:

- Interrogation questions expecting a "right answer" or "one-word" response
- + Request questions enabling clarification or additional information
- + Invitation questions encouraging prediction or child-initiated efforts

Parent-initiated statements:

- Insistence comments demanding a particular "right" response to repeated directions
- Directive comments telling specifically what or how to do
- + Informative comments providing explanations, clarification or relevant cues
- + Invitations comments encouraging prediction, elaboration or self-direction
- + Supportive comments accepting personal decision making

Parent responses to child's efforts:

- Ignores
- Corrects or rejects interpretations or predictions
- Takes control of child's efforts
- + Provides additional cues or information
- + Promotes further elaboration or prediction
- + Confirms predictions or interpretations
- + Values and supports child's questions or comments
- + Offers meaningful praise

B. Characteristics of Children's Language

Child-initiated dialogue:

- + Request questions seeking information
- + Information comments

Child-responses to adult:

- Expected response, usually one-word answer to question
- Repeated word(s) of parent
- + Additional information or elaboration
- + Personal interpretation

C. Teaching Strategies of Parent When Child Reads

- Has child read only "known" words
- Supplies word for child
- Has child "sound out," spell, or "repeat-after-me"
- Corrects word substitutions or rejects child's ideas
- + Encourages risk-taking and child initiation
- + Confirms and accepts
- + Provides appropriate cues/suggestions
- + Responds interactively to child's participation
- + Gives appropriate praise in valuing child's efforts

D. Child's Reading Strategies

- Relies on parent's directions
- + Establishes own model of reading
- + Uses picture cues
- + Uses content cues
- + Uses meaningful word substitutions
- + Self-corrects word substitutions
- + Uses memory reading, cooperative reading, assisted reading or independent reading. (Doake, 1979.)

APPENDIX B

PARENT-CHILD READING PARTNERSHIP SCALE

I. Introduction of Reading Task

1. Vague comments by parents: "We're going to read this book." Or parent reads title but provides no opportunities for child response or discussion. (0-3)
2. Parent initiates comments or raises questions about the book; encourages child to get acquainted with the book; allows time for child response and elaboration. (4-6)
3. Child initiates comments or raises questions about the book; parent responds encouragingly and accepts child's direction. (7-9)

II. Elaboration of Text (Shared Meanings)

1. Limited information provided by the parent to explain text content or to relate it to known experiences of child; limited noting of pictures in relationship to text; no opportunity for child to express own ideas. (0-3)
2. Parent relates events in text to child's experiences or expands upon the text or pictures; encourages discussion with the child. (4-6)
3. Child initiates discussion of text and picture content; elaborates on ideas; parent responds indicates interest and acceptance of child's ideas and predictions. (7-9)

III. Conclusion of Reading Event

1. Parent ends reading task without comment or opportunity child to talk about the text or pictures; asks a question that does not invite further discussion. (0-3)
2. Parent initiates discussion regarding text content; child responds and adds to discussion. (4-6)
3. Child initiates discussion; may look through book and talk about the story or retell the story; parent responds in ways which permit discussion to continue until child ends the reading event. (7-9)

IV. Strategies Used for Enabling Reading Partnership

1. Parent either provides no opportunity for child to become a reading partner or else insists that child tries to read "known" words; parent does not accept child's own reading strategies. (0-3)
2. Parent elicits child's participation in the reading process; encourages child to read familiar phrases; supports child's efforts with appropriate teaching behaviors. (4-6)
3. Child initiates the reading process with personal strategies; parent responds in accepting, noncorrecting ways. (7-9)